

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
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FM USINT HAVANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 704
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 0807

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI XJ CU AO ET SO MO AG FR
SUBJ: CUBANS CONVEY MIXED SIGNALS ON AFRICA

1. SUMMARY: CASTRO TELLS SPECIAL FRENCH ENVOY THAT ETHIOPIAN
DEFEAT IS "INTOLERABLE", MAKES NO PROMISES ON ANGOLA, BUT TAKES
MODERATE TONE ON SAHARA. END SUMMARY

2. MICHEL PONIATOWSKI, SPECIAL EMISSARY OF FRENCH PRESIDENT
GISCARD, VISITED CUBA FROM NOVEMBER 30 THROUGH DECEMBER 2.
PONIATOWSKI'S VISIT WAS PART OF LARGER SWING THROUGH SEVERAL
CARIBBEAN BASIN COUNTRIES. FRENCH EMBASSY COUNSELOR, IN
CONVERSATION WITH USINT OFFICER (GLASSMAN), DECEMBER 6
PROFIDED FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF VISITA.

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3. PONIATOWSKI VISIT WAS SCHEDULED LONG BEFORE CUBAN
NOVEMBER 10 STATEMENT DENOUNCING FRENCH (AND MOROCCAN)
POLICIES IN SAHARA AND AFRICA GENERALLY (SEE HAVANA
577). CONTRARY TO ADVANCE INTIMATION TO USINT FROM SENIOR CUBAN
OFFICIAL, CUBANS DID NOT PRESS FOR ASSURANCES OF FRENCH NON-
INTERVENTION IN ZAIRE, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS ALLEGED FRENCH
SPONSORSHIP OF FLEC INCURSIONS FROM CABINDA. (FYI BRITISH HAVE

ENCOUNTERED TWO RHODESIAN STUDENTS HERE WHO CLAIM THEY WERE TRANSPORTED TO CUBA FROM ANGOLA IN OCTOBER ON SHIP REPATRIATING 900 CUBAN TROOPS FROM CABINDA. IF REPORT IS ACCURATE AND WITHDRAWN TROOPS HAVE NOT BEEN REPLACED, REDUCTION OF FORCES WOULD SUGGEST EASING OF CUBAN CONCERN WITH CABINDA SECURITY.) CASTRO DID HOWEVER, TAKE FRENCH TO TASK FOR THEIR ROLE DURING SHABA CRISIS, AND REPEATED THAT CUBANS DID NOT BACK KATANGESE. WITH REGARD TO ANGOLA SITUATION GENERALLY, CUBANS, WHILE STRESSING CIVILIAN COMPONENT OF THEIR ASSISTANCE, MADE NO PROMISES OF ANY DRAWDOWN OF MILITARY PRESENCE. IF REFERRING TO NAMIBIA, HOWEVER, CASTRO STATED THAT SOUTH AFRICAN TROOP PULL-OUT WOULD WEAKEN UNITA, THUS LIGHTENING MILITARY BURDEN ON CUBANS. BUT CASTRO PROVIDED NO ASSURANCES THAT CUBAN MILITARY ROLE WOULD DIMINISH IN RESPONSE TO SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL.

4. PONIATOWSKI REPORTEDLY WAS MOST STRUCK BY HARSH POSTURE ADOPTED BY CASTRO ON ETHIOPIA. THE CUBAN LEADER SAID THAT DEFEAT AND DIVISION OF ETHIOPIA WOULD BE "UNJUST" AND "INTOLERABLE". HE SAID CUBA WOULD "DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE" AND "TAKE ALL MEASURES TO PREVENT" SUCH A DEFEAT. CASTRO ELABORATED THAT SOVIETS HAD BEEN TRYING TO MAINTAIN NEUTRAL POSTURE BETWEEN SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA. BUT AFTER ABORTED SPRING 1977 TAIZ MEETING IN WHICH HE (CASTRO) HAD PARTICIPATED, CUBANS HAD PUSHED SOVIETS TOWARD SUPPORT OF

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ETHIOPIA, TELLING THEM THAT SAID BARRE WAS LINKED TO "REACTIONARY ARABS" AND WAS SEEKING TO CONQUER REGION. (COMMENT: THIS IS FIRST TIME WE HAVE HEARD THIS ARGUMENT. CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HERE, WHICH WAS SHARED BY NOW DEPARTED SOMALI AMBASSADOR, WAS THAT CUBANS HAD TRIED TO BALANCE BETWEEN SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA. CASTRO'S STRESS ON HIS ONE-SIDED SUPPORT FOR ETHIOPIA IN FACE OF SOVIET EFFORT TO REMAIN NEUTRAL COULD, OF COURSE, SIMPLY BE CONVENIENT POST-FACTO SELF-JUSTIFICATION IN FACE OF SEEMING CUBAN POLICY FAILURE IN SOMALIA. IF CASTRO VERSION IS ACCURATE, HOWEVER, IT MIGHT SUGGEST THAT SOVIET BACKING OF ETHIOPIA IS RELUCTANT AND POSSIBLY MALLEABLE.)

5. ON SHARA, CASTRO REITERATED HIS SUPPORT FOR POLISARIO AND ADMITTED THAT CUBANS HAVE "CIVILIAN ASSISTANTS" (NURSES) "IN RANKS" OF POLISARIO. CASTRO TOLD PONIATOWSKI, HOWEVER, THAT CUBANS HAVE NOT RECOGNIZED SAHARA DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND THAT POLISARIO REPRESENTATIVE (HAVANA 592 AND 609) HAS NOT YET ARRIVED HERE. (IMPLICATION APPARENTLY IS THAT REPRESENTATIVE MIGHT NOT ARRIVE AT ALL.) CASTRO TOOK GENERALLY MODERATE STANCE ON FRENCH SAHARA POLICY, SAID THAT CUBA WANTED FRANCE AND ALGERIA TO

HAVE GOOD RELATIONS, AND OFFERED TO PLAY ROLE AS INTER-MEDIARY BETWEEN PARIS AND ALGIERS. FRENCH DECLINED LATTER OFFER, PREFERRING DIRECT CONTACT WITH ALGERIANS. (COMMENT: MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR TOLD US, DECEMBER 6, THAT CUBANS HAVE SOFTENED THEIR NEGATIVE STANCE ON MOROCCAN POLICY ON SAHARA AND HAVE TOLD MOROCCANS THAT THEY DO NOT WISH TO DAMAGE RELATIONS WITH RABAT).

6. CUBANS DID NOT RAISE RECENT USG AFRICAN STATEMENTS DURING TALKS, DID NOT TOUCH ON BILATERAL CUBAN-FRENCH ISSUES, AND RAISED NO QUESTIONS ABOUT FRENCH DOMESTIC POLITICS.

7. COMMENT: CASTRO'S HARD LINE ON ETHIOPIA PRESUMABLY REPRESENTS CUBAN REACTION TO SOMALI PUSH AT HARAR. CUBAN PRESS CONFIDENTIAL

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(GRANMA, DECEMBER 8) IS NOW REPORTING, HOWEVER, THAT SOMALI PUSH ON HARAR HAS FAILED. CASTRO'S REPORTED ABSENCE OF GIVE ON ANGOLA IS CONSISTENT WITH OTHER RECENT CUBAN MANIFESTATIONS (HAVANA 772). NONETHELESS, THE APPARENT SOFTENING OF THE CUBAN POSTURE ON SAHARA MAY REFLECT A SENSITIVITY TO POLITICAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH EXCESSIVE ACTIVISM IN AFRICA--A RISK PERHAPS BROUGHT HOME BY USG AFRICAN STATEMENTS, SOMALI EXPULSION AND MOST IMPORTANT, APPARENT COMPLAINTS, SPECIFICALLY ON SAHARA BY SOME RADICAL ARABS (HAVANA 609). PONIATOWSKI, INCIDENTALLY REPORTEDLY PERCEIVED CASTRO TO BE SOMEWHAT UNCERTAIN ANY UNEASY ABOUT HIS AFRICAN ROLE, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS ITS FUTURE EVOLUTION. LANE

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